DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 379 341 TM 022 727

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TITLE School Evaluation in Russia: A Cooperative Venture To Establish World Class Standards.
PUB DATE Jul 94
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the National Evaluation Institute of the Center for Research on Educational Accountability and Teacher Evaluation (CREATE) (Gatlinburg, TN, July 10-15, 1994).
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Accreditation (Institutions); *Cooperation; Cross Cultural Studies; Economic Factors; *Elementary Secondary Education; *Evaluation Methods; Foreign Countries; *Institutional Evaluation; Peer Evaluation; Private Schools; Public Schools; *Self Evaluation (Groups); *Standards
IDENTIFIERS *Russia; Standard Setting

ABSTRACT

Of concern to private and public schools in Russia is the evaluation of teachers and schools. The use of voluntary, nongovernmental peer evaluation using extant Western accreditation processes is one choice that is being used in several public and private schools in Russia. This system of peer evaluation and friendly criticism contrasts markedly with the traditional monolithic and generally negative evaluation in Russia. Economic factors hamper the adoption of Western evaluation methods, but they are being embraced to an increasing degree. The new format of school evaluation will result in an exchange of ideas related to performance expectations that has never existed before. Evaluators must get beyond the idea that "made in the U.S." is the standard for the whole world. The move to real "world class" standards receives an important boost from the evaluation exchange that is taking place in Russia today. (Contains 2 references.) (SLD)

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ED 379 341

Paper presented at the

CREATE National Evaluation Institute

July 10-15, 1994

Gatlinburg, Tennessee

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The Institute was supported in part by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, (Grant No. R117Q00047). The opinions expressed are those of the authors, and no official support of these positions by the U.S. Department of Education is intended or should be inferred.

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SCHOOL EVALUATION IN RUSSIA:

A COOPERATIVE VENTURE TO ESTABLISH WORLD CLASS STANDARDS

by David G. Steadman, Ed.D.

SCHOOL EVALUATION IN RUSSIA: A COOPERATIVE VENTURE TO ESTABLISH WORLD CLASS STANDARDS

Background

With the advent of freedom in Russia, entrepreneurship in education has naturally followed. In the last two to three years at least two major movements have rapidly evolved in the country's schools. The first is the establishment of private schools which are often sponsored and directed by Western religious denominations. Frequently the curriculum of these schools is borrowed Christian materials of questionable pedagogical worth. Because they are seen as being "made in America" they are inherently highly valued by Russian parents, students, and to some degree educators.

Another type of school has also emerged in response to the opportunity to experiment. These schools are designed to teach students about free enterprise, democracy, and the economy of a global society. An important part of these programs is again to emulate that which is occurring in the United States, and in some cases the schools in Europe. The International Academy of Banking and Business in Togliatti, Russia is an example. This school, which started in 1992, with 50 high school students (grades 10-11) has now expanded to include a college, a kindergarten, and elementary and secondary school (grades 1-11), with over 1000 students.

The Academy is sponsored by a large bank and automobile manufacturing plant. The ulterior motive is obvious. Students from the academy spend a considerable amount of time in the United

States during their high school years. Many of them will go to college in America. The curriculum for this school is a combination of American textbooks (for English, economics, business, marketing, etc.) and traditional Russian textbooks (for mathematics, science, social studies, languages, etc.).

Of concern to both types of private, as well as the public schools in Russia, is the evaluation of teachers and schools. The use of voluntary, nongovernmental peer evaluation using extant Western accreditation processes is one choice that is being used in several public and private schools in Russia. The use of this system of peer evaluation and friendly criticism is markedly in contrast to the traditional means of evaluating schools and teachers in Russia.

History of School and Teacher Evaluation in Russia

During the Communist regime there existed a single, virtually autonomous governing body for education in the Soviet Union. This was the Ministry of Education which essentially charged itself with assuring the Communist government that all schools were as equal as possible. This was accomplished by implementing a system of teacher and building "inspections." This form of evaluation was dreaded by teachers and students alike. The main purpose of such evaluations was to find something, whatever possible, that might be wrong with the teacher, either personally or professionally. Almost all reports were negative in nature, citing only demerits and deviations. Very little, if any positive references were made in the inspection reports. Inspections were conducted on a scheduled basis, as well as at random by Ministry officials. Achieving the Ministry goal of "preparing highly educated, fully developed, physically healthy, active builders of the Communist society" was paramount in the minds of inspectors.

Perestroika in Russia is currently exemplified by the desire to convert from the traditional system of teacher and school evaluation to a Western format of voluntary, nongovernmental peer reviews represented by the accreditation system in place in the United States, the European Council of Independent Schools, Canada, and the United States Department of Defense school system. Only economics continues to be the most formidable stumbling block to this type of reform.

Both public and private schools in Russia are eager to implement a new system of evaluation. Schools Number 1 and 13 in Magadan, Siberia have been preparing their self-study in anticipation of a multi-nation team review in October, 1994. The International Academy of Business and Banking in Togliatti (600 miles southeast of Moscow) recently completed the evaluation procedure using team members from the Anglo-American School in Moscow, Magadan Public Schools, and the United States. They are currently responding to recommendations and drafting a formative school improvement plan.

Many of the recommendations from the Togliatti review team included suggestions regarding the elimination of inspections as well as the realization of new methods for evaluating staff, students, and programs. No longer will efficacy, in this instance, be judged solely on the basis of standardized test scores. Teachers and administrators will be given an opportunity to respond to any evaluation outcomes. Likewise, they will be integrally involved with the formulation of achievement expectations, evaluation instruments, processes, and interpretation of results.

In the public and private schools where inspections are being maintained as the primary system of evaluation, teachers are leaving in droves. Street jobs, where hard currency is made available, are the primary choice of vocation shift. This also represents the most frequent reason for students to drop out of the secondary and university programs. Jobs related to tourism are a close second in choice, followed by service in the Russian "mafia."

Teachers feeling harassed, frustrated, or subject to inhumane treatment as a result of the inspection process often leave the schools and can increase their income (which is approximately between $50-90 U.S. per month) two to three times in very short order.

The altruism and benevolence that frequently accompanies an intrinsic desire to instruct and share and share knowledge with children is rapidly being replaced by the somewhat selfish, but very realistic desire to make ends meet.

For the most part the Ministry has decentralized the inspection process. Where it is still being used it usually represents a strong local administrative desire to do so. As the word of the "American Model" spreads, more and more schools are experimenting and using democratic processes of school and teacher evaluation. This is important in light of what seems to be occurring very rapidly across America.

School Evaluation in the United States

School evaluation in the United States is undergoing significant changes in both process and substance. For many years school evaluation using the accreditation protocol was largely dependent upon investigating compliance with certain input standards such as teacher/pupil ratios. Current practice, in response to business, government, patron, and professional concern, is much more outcomes oriented with convention now being driven by self prescribed content and organizational performance standards.

Instead of a once a decade, summative self study and on-site evaluation, the process now is an ongoing, formative, highly structured school improvement process specifically oriented to assess achievement of desired learner and institutional outcomes. The new process encourages such concepts as total quality management, site based decision making, authentic assessment and learning, and strategic planning.

Russian independent and public schools will also become a part of this new format for evaluating schools, as will schools throughout Europe and the world (particularly those Department of Defense schools). The significance of this for the development of world class content, assessment, and opportunity to learn standards is profound.

Beyond the Rhetoric

While much is being said by Federal officials, national associations, colleges, and universities regarding "world class standards" very little legitimate dialogue has occurred outside of the United States, with significant others, regarding the matter. There is an underlying assumption

by some that whatever is developed in the United States as performance criteria, will automatically be universally accepted as world class standards. It is probably this kind of thinking which may have been the cause for American education to find itself in the situation that now exists, the result of which is the Goals 2000: Educate America Act program recently approved by the Congress of the United States.

We must get beyond the hollow rhetoric that "made in the US" is the standard for the whole world to live with. In fact, only when appropriate dialogue, experimentation, and common assessments have occurred with others in the world, can we really state that we have developed "world class standards." It is the intent of the Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges to begin the conversation and pursue the cause. An evaluation exchange such as that which is occurring in Togliatti and Magadan, Russia is only the beginning. Much more can and will be done in the near future.

Exciting Possibilities for True World Class Standards

The new format of evaluating schools which will involve schools from Russia and around the world will result in an exchange of ideas related to performance expectations that has heretofore never existed. Common standards, assessments procedures and tools, and environmental minimums can now be compared, discussed, and agreed upon as universally applicable. Students in America, Russia and other countries can truly be subjected to similar pedagogy, with common expectations for achievement. What has previously been a mystery to educators from one country can be openly evaluated and reduced to objective statements of fact.

The vehicle of accreditation has limitless possibilities as exemplified by the NASC-Russia cooperative evaluation program. After a number of evaluations have occurred in Russia, with input from the Ministry, Russian educators, and those participants from the United States, recommendations for common standards will evolve. It is at this point that true "world class standards" will begin to become a reality.

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NOTE: This program will be presented with slides showing both public and private schools in Togliatti, Moscow, and Magadan, Russia.

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